

Q&A: Flu Season 2006-07 and Flu Vaccine Update

What is influenza?

Influenza or 'flu' is a contagious respiratory (affecting the lung) illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times lead to death. Each year in the United States, more than 30,000 persons die from complications from the flu.

What is the best way to avoid getting the flu?

The best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each year. There are two types of flu vaccines:

- The "flu shot" – for use in people age 6 months and older, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine – for use in healthy people age 5 years to 49 years who are not pregnant.

Who should get a flu shot?

Anyone interested in protecting themselves and others from the flu can get vaccinated, but flu shots are especially recommended for:

- Children age 6 months – 23 months
- Women who will be pregnant during flu season
- Adults and children with chronic illnesses, such as heart disease and lung disease (including asthma)
- Adults and children with other chronic diseases, such as diabetes, kidney disease, blood diseases, and problems with their immune system
- Residents of nursing homes
- Persons age 65 years and older

since these persons are at increased risk for severe complications from the flu.

Vaccination is also important for children age 24-59 months, persons age 50-64 years, all health care workers, and persons who live with or take care of anyone mentioned above.

Where can I get a flu vaccine?

Talk to your doctor. If you don't have a doctor or if your doctor doesn't have flu vaccine available, call 2-1-1 Aloha United Way to locate a flu vaccination clinic. From neighbor islands, call 1-877-275-6569, a free call. Aloha United Way is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Will there be a flu vaccine shortage this year?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that more than 100 million doses of flu vaccine will be distributed in the United States during this year's flu season.

In Hawaii, many doctors have received the flu vaccine they ordered. There are also community flu clinics on all islands where flu shots are available. Refer to

the resource list, “Where to get your influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations” at www.vaxhawaii.com for additional details. For all those with Medicare Part B insurance, there is no cost to the patient.

What else can I do to prevent the spread of the flu?

- Cover your coughs and sneezes
- Cough into your elbow, not your hand
- Wash your hands often with soap and water
- Don’t touch your mouth, nose, or eyes
- If you’re not feeling well, stay home, rest, and drink plenty of fluids

If I have more questions, who should I call?

Call your doctor. If you don’t have a doctor or your doctor doesn’t have flu vaccine available, call 2-1-1 Aloha United Way for information about a flu vaccination clinic. From neighbor islands, call 1-877-275-6569, a free call. Aloha United Way is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Also, you may visit www.vaxhawaii.com for the resource list, “Where to get your influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations”.